

1 February 2004
Epiphany 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Disappointed?”

Text: Luke 4:21-32

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Super Bowl starts in (check watch) just about an hour now. As usual, there's been a lot of build up for this game. We expect it to be the best game of the year, between the two best teams. But we're often disappointed. It is often quite less than we had hoped it would be.

But there's also another competition that's about to start, in just about an hour now, and that's the competition for the best Super Bowl commercial. Maybe this competition has become what it is because the games have been so disappointing. This year, 30 seconds of commercial time cost somewhere between 2.3 to 2.4 million dollars! But here too, we're often disappointed. The commercials don't live up to the hype. They are less than we had hoped they would be.

Maybe next year.

But we'll wake up tomorrow morning and go back to work, back to school, back to our normal routines, and quickly forget about it all. And that's good. . . . But what if you couldn't? What if the disappointment was in your life? What if you were disappointed in God? What if things were just turning out quite less than you hoped they would?

There are a lot of people there, in that situation. Many Christians. Disappointed. Thinking that life should be better. God should be taking better care of me. Why believe in God if He's not going to help me?

That's what happened that day in Nazareth, as we heard in the Holy Gospel. The folks in Jesus' hometown had heard about all the things that He had been doing. Healing folks. Driving out demons. Changing water into wine. And now He was coming home, so there was a lot of excitement, a lot of hype.

Jesus as usual goes to Church, to the synagogue. He reads the Scriptures and comments

on them. He reads from the prophet Isaiah: ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*** And He announces, ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*** He is the One of whom these words speak. He is the One who will do these things. He is *the One*.

And it's the time right before kickoff! Excitement is the highest. He's here, He said these kinds of things were going to happen, this is one of our own, Joseph's son – surely He will bestow even more favors, more miracles, more blessings upon us than He did in Capernaum!

And then Jesus says no. ***“Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”*** Look at the great prophets Elijah and Elisha. To whom were *they* sent? No, they didn't just hit the miracle lottery. That's not how it works.

Well the disappointment of the people quickly turns into wrath, into anger. A riot breaks out and they try to throw Jesus off a cliff. That'll at least make them feel a little bit better! If the game's not good, at least the commercials will be! But they're disappointed again. The show was not to be. Jesus ***“passes through their midst”*** and goes away.

Disappointment. Many people today throw Jesus out of their lives because He isn't doing what they think He should be doing. We do it too. God, why did you put me in this situation? God, why did you take my spouse? God, why is my family falling apart? God, why did I get this disease? God, why do unbelievers and scoundrels have a better and easier life than me? God, why aren't you helping? I've been baptized! I'm one of your own! Isn't it supposed to be better than this? . . . Where's a good cliff when you need one?

But notice what Jesus doesn't do. What He *doesn't* do in response to this rejection, in response to this violence directed against Him. He *doesn't* lash back, and berate the people for their unrealistic expectations of Him. He *doesn't* call down legions of angels to protect Him. He *doesn't* drive them off that cliff, like what happened with a herd of pigs once; which is what they probably deserved. He could have done all of that. Be He didn't. . . . Instead, He simply walked away. And I love how the bulletin cover pictures that! He just walks away. Alone. Calmly. Quietly. Not because He wanted to leave them, but to continue His work. To continue teaching. For He had a job to do. A task. To lay down His life for these very people. To lay down His life – not off a cliff, but on a cross. To bear the punishment for their sins, for their anger, for their murderous intent against Him, and for a whole host of other sins. So that they could be forgiven. That

they would believe – not in His miracles – but in His sacrifice.

Disappointment comes when we do not receive what we expect. Or what we think we deserve. Whether its disappointment in the Super Bowl, or commercials, or the Christmas gifts we receive; or disappointment in our families, in our friends, or in our lives; or disappointment with God – it all comes for the same reason. We did not receive what we expected, or what we think we deserved. But maybe the problem is not with everyone else letting me down. Maybe the problem is in me. Maybe its not everyone else – including God – who needs to change. Maybe its me who needs to change.

That's not easy to admit. That's why saying "I'm sorry" is sometimes so hard. That's why repenting is sometimes so hard. Throwing others off the cliff is so much easier!

But what do we deserve from God? We said it again this evening. *"I deserve your punishment now and forever."* Are we disappointed we are not receiving what we deserve? Or perhaps you think you are! Perhaps that is why your life is going as it is, for if anyone has a right to be disappointed, its God! . . . Yet Jesus does not throw us off the cliff like pigs. He instead went quietly and purposefully and intentionally to the cross. He said, *"Father, throw me off the cliff instead. Throw me to the serpent. Punish me instead of them. Father, forgive them."*

And so in Christ we are not given what we deserve, but what we do not deserve. Instead of punishment, forgiveness. Instead of anger, grace. Instead of abandonment, love.

Now, life is still going to happen! You're still going to have ups and downs. You're still going to have fights and arguments. You're still going to have struggles and pains and disappointments. But when you get to the edge of the cliff, when you're life seems to be on the edge, you have a Saviour who will not let you go. A Saviour who laid down His life for you, and who rose from the dead for you, and ascended for you, not to leave you and walk away from you and leave you on your own, but so He could say to you, ***"Lo, I am with you always."*** And truly He is. Not so that you might win the "miracle lottery," but so that you might have a Saviour. Not that you believe because of the miracles, but that you believe in His life and sacrifice for you.

And you'll receive blessings too – make no mistake about that! They will just perhaps be different than you expect. ***"When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."***

And you are fully known by God – more fully than you know yourself. *And He loves you anyway!* With the love that we heard about from First Corinthians. That chapter isn't so much about us – its about Him. His love for you. Love that is patient and kind; that doesn't envy or boast; that isn't arrogant or rude; that bears with you; that delivered up His own body to the flames for you; that puts His body and blood here on the altar for you; that continues to give to you and forgive you; that will never end. . . . There may be a whole lot of things that we want in this life, and even expect or think we deserve. But there is a more excellent way. Not of the cliff, but of the cross.

Somebody, in about 3 or 4 hours from now, is going to walk off the football field in Houston with the Super Bowl trophy, champions for a few months, until it all starts over again next year. Our Saviour fought on the field of battle on Calvary and rose from the dead with the crown of life that will never fade away. That crown that He gives to you. There is no next year. No Roman Numerals to keep track of. There is only one battle, and it has been won. On the third day, and on the last day, we will not be disappointed.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.